

The Bittersweet Little Book

Revelation 10

Just as there was a break between the sixth and seventh seals—with an entire chapter (chapter 7) intervening between them, so there is a break between the sixth and seventh trumpets. The sixth trumpet sounds at the end of Revelation 9, but the seventh angel doesn't sound his trumpet until Revelation 11:15.

The vision recorded in chapter 10 describes the historic development of God's true church. It reveals that His people in the last days, like the early disciples, would experience deep disappointment and that they would then rise to become a worldwide force for God, revealing His grace and truth to the world.

An Angel With a Little Book

With that background, let's look at what Jesus is telling us in Revelation 10. John says,

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them" (Revelation 10:1-4).

John records that this angel comes from heaven, clothed with a cloud. What does that mean? What is the significance of being clothed with a cloud?

As the children of Israel were journeying from Egypt to the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to build a portable sanctuary that could be set up and taken down to accompany them on their travels. When the sanctuary was finished, the Bible says a

. . . cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up (Exodus 40:34-37).

Notice that twice in these verses the cloud is identified as “the glory of the LORD.” During the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel, God led them in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Numbers 9:15-23). God’s presence was in the cloud.

This angel also has a rainbow on his head. We saw previously that a rainbow encircles God’s throne in heaven (Revelation 4:3). That rainbow, like the original one after the flood, is a sign of the promise God made with Noah and his descendants—that God would never again destroy the entire earth with a flood. The rainbow symbolizes God’s justice against sin combined with His mercy towards the sinner. God’s justice is always tempered with mercy.

The angel has a “little book” open in his hand (Revelation 10:2). He says something in a “loud voice.” John doesn’t tell us what the angel said. But when the angel spoke, “the seven thunders uttered their voices” (verse 3).

We’ve seen that the number seven denotes perfection or completion in the Bible. So this is complete thunder, pure thunder speaking. Can we understand the meaning of this symbol?

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed,

“Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him” (John 12:28-29).

God's voice sounded like thunder to those standing nearby. The psalmist described how God had delivered Him from His enemies in these words: "The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice" (Psalm 18:13). When God came down on Mount Sinai to give the Ten Commandments, it sounded to the people like thunder (Exodus 19:16; 20:18). So when we read about thunder in the Bible, we are reading about the voice of God, and *seven* thunders emphasize the perfection and completeness of God's declarations to mankind.

John was on the verge of writing down what the seven thunders said, but he was instructed not to do so (verse 4).

The Little Book Identified

What is the little book in the angel's hand? Is the book open or closed? It is open (verse 2). Verse 2 makes a point of the fact that the book in the angel's hand is open. The fact that this book is open suggests a contrast to a closed book. It suggests that this open book was once sealed or closed. Is there any book mentioned in Scripture that was once closed or sealed?

At the close of the book of Daniel the angel Gabriel tells the prophet, "Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4 see also verse 9). The book of Daniel was sealed until *the time of the end*. Now the book is *open* in the hand of the angel. This tells us that Revelation 10 relates to the end time. The book that was sealed in Daniel 12:4 is now unsealed for God's people to understand.

What specific portion of Daniel would be unsealed at the end time? Daniel understood the prophecy of the great metallic image (Daniel 2). He understood the prophecy of chapter 7 and the sequence of beasts representing kingdoms. He even understood something of the symbolism of the little horn power that would arise out of the Roman Empire. But the prophecy that begins in chapter 8—the prophecy of the cleansing of the sanctuary and the 2,300 days—Daniel admits "I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it" (Daniel 8:27). The prophecy of 2,300 years and all the implications of the cleansing of the sanctuary was something that Daniel never fully understood even though Gabriel came to try to help him understand. So the angel told

Daniel, “Seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future” (verse 26). It was this portion of Daniel’s book—the prophetic portion having to do with time far down in the future—that would be sealed right down to the time of the end.

Now this glorious angel descends from the throne of God with a little book open in his hand and declares that “there should be delay no longer . . . but the mystery of God would be finished” (Revelation 10:6, 7).

At the end time Daniel’s sealed book would be unsealed. God’s people would study the time prophecies having to do with the judgment and the final cleansing of God’s sanctuary. They would be thrilled with what they found in the little open book and go out to proclaim God’s last day message with great power.

No More Delay

So John sees an angel come down from heaven. He is clothed with the glory of God. He has a book in his hand, and he stands with one foot on the land and the other on the sea. Standing on both the land and sea denotes that this angel has a message that is universal in nature. It is for all humanity everywhere. He has a message of the greatest importance from God. Through him, God’s voice thunders through the earth with a message for all mankind at the end of time.

John records the words of this angel.

The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets (Revelation 10:5-7).

When the Bible pictures an angel with one foot on the earth and one foot on the sea, denoting a universal message, and when that angel lifts up his hand to heaven in a solemn oath, than that message is one we should heed. When the Bible pictures an angel coming

from the very presence of God and thundering with the voice of God, it's a message we should pay attention to. The angel swears by Him who lives forever and who created all things in heaven, earth, and sea. In other words, he brings a message from the Creator that Daniel's time prophecy of the 2,300 days (years) is unsealed and that there shall be no more delay. It is time for God's judgment hour to begin and for His last-day message to go to the ends of the earth.

In the KJV, the angel says, "There shall be time no longer" (verse 6). In the New Testament there are two words for "time." One word has to do with an event that happens, for example July 4 or December 25. These are dates on a calendar; they are specific points of time. The word for a point of time in the Greek language is *χαιρος* (*chairos*). If something happens at a point of time, you use that word. But that is not the word used in Revelation 10:6 when it says, "There should be time no longer." The word used in Revelation 10:6 is *χρονος* (*chronos*) That's the Greek word from which we get the English words *chronology* and *chronometer*. *Chronos* is not a specific point in time, but a "length of time" or a "period of time." The angel in Revelation 6 is saying, "There should be a *period of time* or a *length of time* no longer." The time prophecies of Daniel take us down the sequence of the ages—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome. The longest time prophecy in the Bible, the 2,300-year prophecy—that chronology, that period of time, would run out. There would be delay no longer. God's great judgment hour has come, and God's people would be going out to preach the soon return of Jesus to the whole world in the light of the special time they lived in.

The Mystery of God Is Finished

At the close of the 2,300-years God would take into His own hands the finishing of His Word on earth and there would be a mighty spiritual revival. The mystery of God is to be finished. We have come to the end time.

What is the *mystery* of God? Paul wrote, "To them [the saints] God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). So the mystery of God that is to be finished in the end time is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." It is the gospel, the good

news, of salvation in Jesus and the glory of His Second Coming. But this mystery is not only something to be *proclaimed*. It is something to be *lived!*

Eating the Little Book

Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, “Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.” So I went to the angel and said to him, “Give me the little book.” And he said to me, “Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.” Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (Revelation 10:8-11).

What does it mean to take the prophecies of Daniel and eat them? It means to internalize them and live in the joy that comes from following God. The prophet Jeremiah testified, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16). This group of end-time people would take the prophecies of Daniel, the words of God, and eat them—taken them into their life. They would find these prophecies sweet as honey in their mouth, but bitter in their stomach.

Sweetness Turns to Bitterness

In the early 1800s God raised up faithful men and women around the world who fervently believed Jesus was coming soon. These early Adventists (not yet Seventh-day Adventists) studied Revelation chapter 10. They studied Daniel. And as they did so, they came to the conclusion that the sanctuary that would be cleansed at the end of the 2,300-year prophecy was the earth and that it would be cleansed by fire at the Second Coming of Jesus. They learned that the 2,300 years were to end in 1844. They traced and re-traced the prophecy and became convinced that Jesus would return in 1844 at the close of the

prophecy. As they refined the prophecy further, these early Adventist believers settled on the date October 22, 1844. They were sure Jesus would come on that day.

There was a worldwide spiritual revival and an anticipation of Jesus' return in the 1840s. It was so sweet in their mouths! It was like honey to think that soon they would be with their Savior. Then October 22, 1844 arrived—and Jesus didn't return!

The Great Disappointment at the Cross

Shouldn't they have known better? Didn't Jesus say that no one knew the hour of His coming—not even the angels in heaven (Matthew 24:36)?

We shouldn't judge them too harshly. Their disappointment 1844 wasn't the only one that has taken place in connection with the followers of Christ. They weren't the only ones to be mistaken. Christ's disciples in the first century made a similar mistake. They overlooked the prophecies in the Old Testament that predicted the Messiah's death. Right up until the crucifixion they were looking for Jesus to set up His kingdom on the earth. He tried to prepare them for His death, but they didn't listen. They were so sure He would soon usher in His kingdom. There are two kinds of prophecies in the Old Testament about the first coming of Jesus as the Messiah. One group focuses on His coming as a king. The other focuses on His death. The disciples misunderstood the prophecies. They thought He was coming to earth to set up His kingdom, and when he didn't they were bitterly disappointed.

Beginning in Disappointment, Ending in Joy

But out of that disappointment came understanding. God poured out His Spirit powerfully on these disciples, and they went out to preach the gospel to the world in their day. What happened in the first century to raise up the Christian church would happen in a similar way at the end. Christ's last-day disciples would study the prophecies anew and discover their mistake. The sanctuary to be cleansed at the end of the 2,300 years was not the earth at Jesus' Second Coming. It was the sanctuary in heaven and the beginning of a special work of judgment. Like the first-century disciples, these early Adventists went out to preach the gospel message with a special emphasis on the judgment going on in heaven. Notice the parallels between the disappointment at the cross and the disappointment in 1844.

God brings joy out of disappointment. Out of the disappointment of the cross, God brought joy and a movement that went to the then-known world with the good news of salvation in Jesus. Out of the disappointment of 1844, God raised up an end-time movement to prepare men and women for the return of Jesus.

To those disappointed people in the time of the end, the angel says, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (Revelation 10:11). God says, “I have a message for you to take to the ends of the earth to every nation and language.” We will be looking at that three-fold message in Revelation 14. Just like He took those disappointed early Christians, God would take this bitterly disappointed small group of people at the time of the end and commission them to go to the entire world with a message that would prepare men and women for the return of Jesus. Revelation chapter 10 tells about a group of people that would be raised up through a bittersweet experience to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim the message of Jesus until He comes again.

Revelation chapter 10 speaks of our day. It speaks of a task not only begun, but a task finished. It speaks of a task that begins in disappointment, but ends in glory and in power.